
KNOW AND GROW IN CHRIST

PART 3

Psalm 33:1-9

*Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!
Praise befits the upright.
Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

Today I am going to preach and teach on a subject, and I don't know that I've ever taught an entire message on this subject. I am going to share with you today on the subject of singing. I am going to teach you to sing today. Yeah, that's a frightening proposition, isn't it? Because we are talking about gathering, that **we exist to know and grow in Jesus. And to know and grow in Christ is to know and grow in faith, in obedience, in relationship with Christ, and in helping others – all four of those things.**

We have laid out for you a strategy as a church that involves gathering, connecting, serving, and growing. Gathering – what we are doing right now Sunday morning, the main time that we gather; connecting – relationally and in the truth of God, applying it to one another’s lives and encouraging one another in community; serving – giving of our time, talents, and treasure to build the church and to share God’s love in word and deed with others; and growing. The last one is maybe the least obvious in terms of the activity that corresponds to growing, but it’s very, very important. **We are talking here about spending time with God in his word and in prayer, and how that intentional time of devotion flows into everyday life, providing for us a rhythm for spiritual growth as we walk with the Lord.**

So, gather. I thought about this. If I’m going to teach about gathering, there are a lot of ways to go about this. We could start by talking about the Sabbath and what God teaches on the Sabbath. That would be one way to approach it. There would be a number of ways to approach it, but we are going to approach it by two messages, and those messages are on the two main things that we do when we gather. We sing and we preach. Well, someone preaches, but we engage in the activity of hearing preaching. I hope that the Lord will allow us as we look at his word to see, “Oh, that’s why we do these two things!”

If I could give you one word that grabs ahold of what happens when we gather, or what we are after, that word would be faith. We want to grow in our faith as we corporately gather, and these two activities -- singing and preaching -- help us to do that.

There was a television broadcast called “The Hour of Power.” Anyone ever watch “The Hour of Power” with Robert Schuller? He built a Crystal Cathedral in California and they met for “The Hour of Power.” He has since passed on, but he ran out of power because they went bankrupt and lost the Crystal Cathedral. But it was a great name in terms of describing what happens when we gather, in that we want faith to rise up, and that results in power – power in God.

So if you are a Christian and you come to this time in the worship service and a neighbor or a work associate says to you, “What do you do?” If you say, “Well, we sing and we hear someone preach,” I think you get this curious, “What?! You sing together? You sing and someone preaches?” The word “preaching” in and of itself doesn’t have a really great connotation in our day, right? “Don’t preach at me,” might be something we would say. But the proclaiming of the good news results in faith and power in the believer’s life. It’s a main part of what we do when we gather.

For example, Romans 10:17: “...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” The “word of Christ” there is really the gospel, the good news about Jesus, and the good news of what Jesus has done for you and what happens when you trust in him. And as we place our faith in Christ, the result is God’s power at work in our lives.

The same thing happens when we sing. In fact, in this song the psalmist tells us that it's so fitting for God's children to praise him, he tells us a little bit about how to do that. Then when he starts to give us reasons to praise him, the first one is the word of God. The word of God is pure and upright. It's true and it's powerful. He celebrates God's power, that God's power goes forth to change and transform, just as God's power goes forth to create anew.

So, singing -- that's what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about preaching in the future, but right now singing. Just a very simple outline:

- I. **Singing's importance.**
- II. **Guidelines.**

We are going to talk about why it's important and some guidelines on how to do it.

- I. **Singing's importance.**

In terms of its importance, I'm going to give you four reasons. I won't be able to develop all four of those, but I'm going to give them to you and try to develop the first couple. The first one is that singing expresses.

- 1) **Singing expresses.**

One of the most incredible personal moments in my life was a time when my wife told me that she wanted to communicate something to me. She asked me to sit down on the couch and she played a song for me. I'm not going to tell you what the song was, because it would embarrass me and really embarrass you, perhaps. But it was an incredibly personal moment.

Now, she had verbalized some of those same things, maybe all of those things to me. But there was a moment of communication where she expressed herself in a new way, in a deeper way. There is this longing in our hearts to get out what's in there, right? A boy can say to a girl, "You're beautiful," but what if she's really beautiful? What if she's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen? What if she's a one-of-a-kind beauty? You can say all those things, but after a while you can feel a little ridiculous. It can almost sound insincere or phony. All of a sudden you are trying to express something that's really on your heart, but it's difficult to do.

Song is a gift that God gives us to help us express what's in our hearts. That's part of its importance. We are commanded over a hundred times in scripture to sing. It's difficult to find anything in scripture that you are told to do more than that. Maybe pray, maybe give thanks. There are some things that would rival that, but it's profoundly important in terms of its emphasis in scripture, and it's wonderful.

This morning we were singing this song, and hearing it sung. “What a beautiful name it is. You have no rival. You have no equal.” The expression of that helps us to communicate adoration to the Lord. #1 – Singing expresses.

2) Singing shapes.

It shapes us. It shapes our hearts. To say it another way, it helps us to internalize very important things.

I’m going to share a couple of passages. If you’re taking notes you can write them down. I don’t think you’ll have time to go to each passage, so just listen, please. Start with Ephesians 5:18-21. This is a passage where Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit. He tells us:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I know I moved through that quickly, but he tells us to be filled the Spirit, then he gives us five things associated with the filling of the Spirit. Three of those have to do with singing. That’s fascinating! You want to ask the question, “Okay, wait a minute. Does this mean that I will do these five things out of the filling of the Holy Spirit, as a result? Or do these five things cause the filling of the Holy Spirit?” I think just the fact that you’re asking that question already tells you that the way Paul structures it, it’s both.

There’s a parallel passage that is helpful; Adam preached on it not too long ago. Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Ephesians 5: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit,” and a parallel now in Colossians 3: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Do you hear the parallel?

Here is what I’m suggesting to you. **There is this activity when we sing unto the Lord where God’s truth, the word of Christ, the gospel, the good news, is driven down into our hearts.** It’s internalized. As we sing to the Lord and express worship and adoration, and we celebrate who God is, those things are experienced and vitalized in our life.

R.C. Sproul is an amazing teacher, but like a lot of amazing teachers, sometimes when he makes his points, he over-makes his points. Who am I to criticize R.C. Sproul, right? Well he has this little thing that he repeats all the time. He does not like 7-11 music. He says the same seven words sung eleven times. The point he’s trying to make is, “Let’s have some substance to our songs and not be shallow.” It’s a good point, and one that we want to give some weight to, but you can overstate that. Because when you repeat a chorus, a certain truth has a way of working its way down into you. We sang

today, “Lord, I need you. Every hour I need you.” I can say that, but as I sing that to God, the melody carries it down into my soul and the rhythm has a way of just tamping it down. It’s a gift from God to help us internalize and personalize very important scriptural truths.

I think maybe this is one of the more helpful points this morning and I want to linger here for a moment. Because when I get done today, you will say, “Wow. Gathering in worship is where I get power. It’s where God meets me. It’s important. I’m not just going to go *every* week. I’m going to go *early* every week. And I’m going to go *prepared* every week. And I’m going to once and for all bury this mindset that it’s optional or that I’ll get there when I want to.” We gather to worship. It’s a worship service.

That’s a problem description, isn’t it? What’s the problem with saying this is a worship service? “Well, Brian, isn’t everything worship? Isn’t life worship?” 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” When I go to work I’m worshipping God. When I eat, I want to eat to the glory of God. You say, “Boy, that’s strange.” Well, that’s what 1 Corinthians 10:31 says! And that means there is a place where I eat to the Lord, where I enjoy this as the bounty and the goodness of God and revel in his goodness, but then there’s a place where excess is just completely inappropriate. There is even a place where a little bit of excess is appropriate, right? Christmas morning you eat ice cream at nine in the morning. But you are not going to do well if you eat ice cream every morning. Are you with me?

Wayne Grudem says it like this when talking about the worship service: “**Worship is a direct expression of our ultimate purpose in life**” – a direct expression. So, work or eating is worship, but it’s an indirect expression. When you go to work, you don’t say, “I’m going to worship,” right? It doesn’t quite...even though it is worship. It’s helpful to be reminded of that. But when we come here, we are saying, “I go to worship,” because the activity itself is directly aligned with my ultimate purpose of worshipping God. Got it?

I’m going to give you an illustration. It’s intimate. It’s not personal, but it is intimate and I think it’s appropriate, so I pray it’s not misunderstood. When a couple gets married, that marriage is consummated when two become one flesh in physical intimacy. It’s precious unto the Lord. That is a direct alignment of the purpose and the reality of marriage. That’s why it’s reserved for marriage and why it should be pursued as a part of marriage. And when our marriages are not healthy, that almost inevitably will suffer and why it shouldn’t be neglected. Because why? In that moment I’m aligned with what we are. And the reality is, if we are like this, often it’s difficult to do what is closely aligned with what we are.

That’s what this is about. If you’re just not living for God at all, you’re not living a life of worship, it’s hard to come in here and worship the Lord. It is! It should be! It should be that you come in and get right with God so that you *can* worship the Lord. So singing shapes us.

The last two I'm not going to develop, but let me give them to you.

3) Singing educates us.

“For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.” We sing his word. We sing truth about God. It helps. Did you use songs to teach your children? Or did you learn songs to learn the capitals of the 50 states and the names of the presidents? Anyone else do that? Yeah, we would get in the car, “Hey, can we hear the state capital song?” “Oh no!” It's a great memory device. That's probably not exactly what we're doing, but we sing things that are important in terms of truth. It shapes our heart, but it also instructs us and educates us. The content is very important.

4) Singing inspires.

Singing expresses, shapes, educates, inspires. A number of Christians have given testimony that they were actually saved through hearing inspirational music, hearing worship. They were brought into the church hearing worship, and there is an aspect where we are commissioned as we lift our praise to God. We are here in his presence, and we are inspired with his greatness and his power. Faith rises up. We are empowered and there is a commissioning effect to go and to do his will.

That's all under why it's important. Let's look at some guidelines.

II. Guidelines.

Let me teach you, if I can, how to sing. I'm aware of the irony of that, but let me quickly give you seven guidelines. Before I give you #1, the idea here is that there's a right way to do this and there's a wrong way to do it, and for the importance to be realized, we need to work with these biblical guidelines.

1) Skillfully.

You are saying, “Well, that rules me out.” No, when we corporately gather, the quality matters. We read it in verse 3: “...play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.” What you're going to see as we go through these guidelines is that one guideline will create a tension with another. That's #1. #2 is sincerely.

2) Sincerely.

We are told to worship the Lord from the heart. In fact, when Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” You will remember in Matthew 22:37-38, he said this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” Worship is from the heart and it involves the entire person. In fact, one teacher defined worship in this way, and this is kind of common: **“Worship is ascribing ultimate worth with your entire being.”** Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

soul and with all your mind” -- your emotions, your mind, your will, your heart -- everything given to the Lord. This means that we don’t want to be duplicitous. We don’t want hidden agendas, but to worship the Lord from the heart.

What I would say to our worship team and to those who have a responsibility to lead us is that these two things form a tension: worshipping skillfully and growing in your skill before the Lord, but not neglecting the matters of the heart and your faith and your walk with God. Both are given to us as important in worship. We sing to God from the heart.

3) Passionately.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” with everything that you are. There is an acknowledgment: “God, you are of ultimate worth and I am giving my whole being to you in expressing that.” Passionately.

4) Expressively.

I recognize that there is some repetition, but the nuance of these guidelines is helpful. Here the emphasis is on expression. I’m saying that if I worship God with my whole being, then I’m going to express that in a way that reflects that. Scripture tells us to lift holy hands to the Lord. We kneel before God. And that helps us communicate adoration to him.

As a church we try not to get weird and overemphasize that, because it becomes obviously very shallow, right? We are aware that that’s not a good emphasis in scripture, but we want an atmosphere where there is a healthy freedom to express worship to the Lord. Because we were made to do that, and the singing of songs, then as we are doing that, lifting our hands and expressing worship to the Lord, is helpful to us.

These are guidelines for how we sing. Let me give you #5, #6, and #7. I want to ask you to go to 1 Corinthians 14 so that I can share these. #5 is with understanding, #6 is with order, and # 7 is with one another.

5) With understanding.

6) With order.

7) With one another.

When I was in college I joined a glee club. Do you know what a glee club is? It’s a male choir. Yeah, that’s me. My brother is a musician and I lived with my brother. All his friends were my friends. My brother got a Ph.D. in music and started out as a worship pastor. He got all the music ability in the family. Somehow, against my better judgment, I allowed him to talk me into trying out for this glee club. And our landlord was the director of the glee club. So I went in

to the tryout, and the tryout required me to sing a solo. There was this panel of about 15 guys, and my landlord, who was the director of the choir, and I had to sing a solo. I practiced this solo, and it was one of the most painful experiences of my entire life. I can sort of get on the right note, but I was just made to sing with other people and not alone.

That is probably the reality for the great majority of us here. There are people here who can sing alone and they have that quality of voice. But I need to tell you, when I get around people who are really good, I sound amazing! It frees me to enter in and to sing and to celebrate God. It helps me express glorious truths. I don't know about you, but I was moved deeply today in our time of worship. It was such a gift for me to be able to express these glorious truths in song. I've tried doing it alone, and I do sing a little bit alone, but it takes a lot of grace. I shut the door, shut the windows, and do it softly.

Now, there are a number of reasons, and I can't develop them all theologically, but we have a voice, Riverside. We have a voice unto God. As a congregation, we come to sing. There was a point, even today, where the leadership backed off and we were encouraged to sing. That's so important for us to just keep understanding that we are talking about not just music, not a performance, we are singing to the Lord. When you understand that that's important for us together before the Lord, that Colossians 2 demonstrates to all of heaven: "Wow, these people can actually get along and do something together! That could only be God!" That's a rough translation of Colossians 2. That's a miracle. That demonstrates to heaven something beautiful, but also it's a blessing to you individually, because it's helping you experience something and internalize it. It's shaping you as God is glorified.

When you get that, that it's with one another, then you understand points 5 and 6: with understanding and with order. That's why we're in 1 Corinthians 14. So let me try to give those to you. The Corinthian church was big on spiritual gifts. If you are in the membership class, this Wednesday night we are going to talk about: What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is the filling of the Holy Spirit? We are going to talk about the spiritual gifts. Are the gifts for today? It will be all about the gifts. If you're not in that class, you can certainly come. We've only had one. But even if you're a member and you say, "Wow, I'd like a refresher," you're welcome to join us at 7:00 Wednesday night. That's the context here.

The Corinthian church was using the spiritual gifts in a way that was not healthy. It was destructive. And Paul gives an entire chapter of instruction on how to use the gifts. He has two points. Verses 1-25: with understanding. Verses 26-40: with order. These are the guidelines that Paul gives them for when they gather in worship. In essence, his first point is this. He says, "Listen, you guys are coming together and people are speaking in tongues. That is, they have Spirit-given language of worship and praise and prayer to God that no one else can understand. They are speaking in tongues and no one else is understanding. Paul says, "Well, there's no benefit, really, to anyone except that person. That person is being

built up well enough. He or she is having an incredible experience with God, but no one else understands.” This is a very important principle. When we gather, we don’t want people to say, “Hmmm. That’s strange. I wonder what that means,” because there’s no edification that comes as a result.

I’m not saying that there should be no passion or no emotion, because people may come in who don’t know God and say, “Wow, these people really love God. They are really connecting with God. I’ve never seen anything like that.” That’s wonderful. But that guideline, and it will be subjective, has a lot to do with what we do and don’t do in worship.

On several occasions, I have been in a worship service where out of nowhere someone will jump up and start shouting. It might be a prophecy, or it might be spoken in tongues, or tongues with a prophecy following. And on those few occasions, I’ve generally either stopped the person or waited until they’ve finished and said, “Okay, please don’t do that again.” Almost always in those situations, the person is brand new. They are there for a first or second time, and they are taking over the meeting.

I want you to understand that the reason we stop them is because we are saying, “Listen, number one, has God called you to be an elder in this church? Are you taking responsibility in this moment for all of these people? Have you been recognized as a spokesperson from God to bring this message? You are self-appointed.” God has shepherds that he has called. And you know what? This is a sobering thing; I’m not saying this lightly. When those shepherds stand before God, they are going to be responsible for the people. Please pray for your pastors. It’s a huge responsibility. But this chapter of scripture causes me as a pastor to stop that person in the moment and say, “Wait a minute. I don’t know you. I don’t know what you are going to say. I don’t know if it’s going to be understood. It’s certainly not in order with where we are going right now as a congregation. Come and see me privately and we will test it. We will see.” The guidelines that drive us in that are found right here in 1 Corinthians 14.

He spends the whole first half of the chapter saying, “Guys, don’t just get together and have a free for all. It’s not helpful. It doesn’t edify.” Some people say, “Yeah, that’s because if unbelievers are present you need to do that.” He says, “No, no, no, no.” Much of his application in those first 25 verses is for believers. You want to come and sing and you want to be thinking about the content of the words, comprehending them, because that will enrich your whole experience of worship to the Lord. And if you don’t understand, it’s great to say, “Hey, we sang this lyric today and I didn’t get it. What does it mean?”

Then he says that obviously the unbeliever will really be confused. He makes that as a secondary application in the last five verses of that section. Then in verses 26 through 40, he says, “Let everything be done with order.” And he actually gives very specific guidelines about how many should prophecy, how long they should, how it should be done, if someone

should speak in tongues, if they should not – all of those. I think that there would be guidelines here that would shift according to the size of the meeting. If you come Wednesday night, I'll tell you more.

The church was experiencing a lot of challenges. Women, for example, had lived in a very confined manner. They were experiencing freedom in Christ, and they were just blowing off the doors in terms of exercising their liberty in such a way that the culture was looking and really confused about what that meant. So, Paul doesn't hesitate to come in and say, "Listen, let me give you some instruction on how to do this with order."

When I was in the glee club, I always envied people that were musical. I just didn't seem to have it. One day we traveled to another city to be in this great big enormous church and we did some of the special music for that particular Sunday. I will never forget it. We were all up front and we were singing. At one point in the song, a cappella, no instrumentation, I came in early, only me. "Ahhh!" My landlord looked at me. I'm sure he was thinking, "Watch me, dummy."

It's not helpful when you are expressing worship to the Lord personally in a way where everyone looks at you. We want to come before God with one voice. I can't give you a rule, but there is a place where your liberty becomes something that's not edifying others. There's nothing wrong with it. It could have to do with volume. It could have to do with what you are doing. It's a subjective thing, I freely admit to you, but the guidelines are here to worship the Lord so we can all comprehend it, where we are focused on the Lord, and we are doing it with certain order.

And because it's subjective, you may struggle with how it's being applied. I've been to churches where if someone lifts their hands the pastor will get up and say, "You know, people who lift their hands are just trying to draw attention to themselves." I'm thinking, "How can you say that? The bible tells you everywhere to lift holy hands to God!" That seems like a natural expression. People who don't even know the Lord to go a concert and do, you know, whatever they do. So it can't be that weird, right?

I'm wrapping this up. Church, I know it may seem like it was in jest, but I want to say in earnest: **What we do here is significant. We are worshipping the creator of the universe.** There is a power that comes to you. If you will get into a rhythm of life where you are faithful, regular, it's settled in your life, it's a priority, you are here on time and early, and you are giving attention to preparing yourself, there will not only be a great benefit for you, but for all of us, and for those who don't know Christ.

The truths that we sing will help us address the challenge of that. I'm going to have a default to just think about me. I'm going to be prone to think, "What do I want to do and what's convenient for me?" I will be the first to tell you: There's growth for all of us, myself included. But if you will say to the Lord, "Lord, align my heart with this value, because it's biblical and it's right," he will meet you. He will sweep in and he will help you, so that we do this -- not legalistically. If

Special Messages – Know and Grow in Christ, Part 3

Psalm 33:1-9 | Sunday, January 15, 2017 | By Brian Brookins



you come 30 minutes late for the next 30 years, we are going to keep loving you, but you are going to keep hearing this message. It's worth you being faithful and on time. Amen?